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The Capabilities and Order of Battle of Vietnamese Forces in Cambodia

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

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*NI IIM 85-10010
October 1985*

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THE CAPABILITIES AND
ORDER OF BATTLE OF
VIETNAMESE FORCES IN CAMBODIA

Information available as of 10 October 1985 was
used in the preparation of this Memorandum.

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SCOPE NOTE

The 1984-85 dry-season campaign in Cambodia left the Vietnamese and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in a much improved military position vis-a-vis Cambodian resistance forces—both Khmer Rouge and non-Communist. This Interagency Intelligence Memorandum (IIM) assesses the capabilities of Vietnamese forces now in Cambodia to carry out specific postulated missions likely under existing post-dry-season conditions. It also estimates the role and capabilities of PRK forces to participate in these missions.

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This Memorandum was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Office for East Asia. It was drafted by the Defense Intelligence Agency.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

We believe that the Vietnamese forces permanently based in Cambodia, augmented by the existing People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) forces, can accomplish most of the security missions that Hanoi envisions for its forces:

- Demonstrating control of the border and its environs to prevent establishment of a "liberated area" [REDACTED]

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- Securing the Cambodian interior sufficiently to enhance the legitimacy of Heng Samrin's PRK regime and permit delegation to PRK forces of a greater degree of responsibility for rear area security.

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Vietnamese troops in Cambodia as of 1 September are estimated to number about 130,000 to 140,000. This new estimate, down from the previous one of 150,000 to 170,000, reflects both modest troop withdrawals and a reanalysis of existing data. [REDACTED]

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Vietnam has improved its logistic system in Cambodia to the point where there are no major shortages of ammunition or petroleum products. [REDACTED]

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Hanoi is dependent on Soviet military aid, which is abundant (Vietnam ranks seventh among Soviet aid recipients). We expect this level to continue—allowing some equipment modernization within the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), but not greatly increasing the capabilities of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. [REDACTED]

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Vietnam has said that it intends to withdraw from Cambodia by 1990. Although Hanoi probably would like to reduce its forces, we not only find this date unrealistic, but believe that Hanoi intends to maintain a sizable military presence in Cambodia indefinitely. [REDACTED]


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Should the fortunes of the Vietnamese and PRK forces in Cambodia take a turn for the worse, Hanoi has a demonstrated capability to



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bring in additional forces on comparatively short notice (two divisions within 14 days). 

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If, over a period of a year or more, non-Communist resistance forces succeed in efforts  to operate independently in the rear areas, some augmentation of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia may be necessary. 

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DISCUSSION

1. The six-year-old war in Cambodia is essentially a three-way struggle for control among (1) the Vietnamese and their surrogate regime, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK); (2) the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot; and (3) a coalition of non-Communist factions. Since mid-1984 the Vietnamese have adopted a more aggressive military strategy [redacted]

[redacted] An umbrella organization to unite the Khmer Rouge and the non-Communists has failed to paper over the smoldering hostility within the resistance, hostility that dates back to the period of Pol Pot's brutal rule between 1975 and 1979. Recent military setbacks have failed to generate greater unity among the resistance factions. [redacted]

PAVN

2. Vietnam has carried on its war against the resistance with the political objective of establishing a reliable surrogate government in Phnom Penh, along the lines of that in Laos. To this end, Hanoi pursued a strategy aimed at [redacted]

[redacted] diplomatic acceptance for Heng Samrin's PRK regime and improving PRK military capabilities. [redacted]

3. We believe Hanoi permanently bases between 130,000 and 140,000 troops in Cambodia. This estimate, lower than our previous estimate of between 150,000 to 170,000 men, reflects both modest troop withdrawals and a more precise analysis of the order of battle of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), in particular our better understanding of the PAVN table of organization and equipment (TO&E). [redacted]

4. Our judgment that PAVN capabilities are considerable, especially when measured against those of the resistance, remains unchanged. Most PAVN officers above the company level are combat-experienced veterans of the second Indochina war. The ratio of support forces to frontline troops is high. Support facilities such as hospitals, maintenance facilities, and ammunition depots, for example, are in some instances located in southern Vietnam. We believe that about 20,000 men at these facilities are assigned a primary responsibility of supporting operations in Cambodia. [redacted]

5. In addition, rather than maintain a larger baseline strength in Cambodia, Hanoi has periodically drawn on units in southern Vietnam for special purposes, generally to augment combat forces at times of dry-season offensive activity. In the 1984-85 dry season, for instance, two PAVN divisions were brought in from southern Vietnam, one for the campaign against the Khmer Rouge resistance in the Phnom Melai area, the other for use in the Thailand-Cambodia-Laos triborder area. [redacted]

6. We estimate that, at present, Vietnam has nearly 40,000 troops that could be moved to Cambodia from existing locations in southern Vietnam should the need arise. (This figure excludes provincial units that are logistically capable of being moved to Cambodia, but which almost certainly would be retained in Vietnam for rear area security.) Regular forces available for deployment to Cambodia total 38,750, made up of 11,650 in Military Region V, of 5,550 in Region VII, of 11,000 in the 4th Strategic Army Corps (located in Region VII but independent), and 10,550 others. The 2nd Division, which was moved into western Cambodia in early 1985 and subsequently returned, is located at An Khe in Military Region V. The 7th Division, which was also active in Cambodia during the past dry season, is part of the 4th Strategic Army Corps in Military Region VII. [redacted]

7. From the outset, there has been some confusion concerning the impact of Vietnamese troop withdrawals and rotations on Vietnamese capabilities in Cambodia. According to Vietnamese law, a conscript's tour in Cambodia is limited to three years. Although this provision is not strictly observed, troop rotation does take place, generally in the spring (April-May) and fall (October-November) of each year. These ongoing rotations make it difficult to verify Hanoi's claims of permanent withdrawals. In 1983 the Vietnamese apparently withdrew over 11,000 troops. The following year, however, we were able to verify the withdrawal of only about 4,000 troops. [redacted]

8. This year, the problem has been complicated by Hanoi's having reinforced its forces in Cambodia by more than two divisions in the fall of 1984. As a result,

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we credit Vietnam with having withdrawn a maximum of 3,200 troops thus far in 1985. []

9. In any event, even as the Vietnamese announced their first troop withdrawals in 1982, they were increasing in-country capabilities by greater use of combined-arms operations. Although the PAVN had made some use of combined infantry, armor, and artillery tactics in Cambodia from the outset, earlier operations had often involved mass infantry assaults against well-defended resistance strongholds, supported by a few armored vehicles and limited artillery fire support. During the 1982-83 dry season and again during the 1983-84 dry season, the PAVN conducted more effective combined-arms assaults against resistance bases along the Thai-Cambodian border. PAVN commanders maneuvered full infantry regiments, supported by one or more artillery regiments and armored battalions, to overrun these bases. []

10. Several other factors were also important in the success of Vietnam's 1984-85 offensive. The PAVN moved to multidivisional operations, demonstrating an ability to attack widely scattered objectives simultaneously. Elements of four divisions were employed in the Phnom Melai campaign, the largest force assembled for a single operation in Cambodia since the invasion in 1978. The Vietnamese have improved their logistic system, employing thousands of drafted Cambodian civilians to upgrade roads throughout Cambodia. Supply services were upgraded to the point where there appear to have been no major shortages of ammunition or petroleum products, notwithstanding heavy expenditure of ordnance of all kinds. There was also greater use of armor along the Thai border than in any recent year. []

PRK Forces

11. Vietnam clearly intends to turn over to the PRK army greater responsibility for internal security. Despite a spotty performance, PRK forces have assumed a larger role both in terms of combat and in occupying captured resistance base areas. A pattern detected during the 1983-84 dry season—the employment of Cambodian troops in joint operations with the Vietnamese—continued in the 1984-85 dry season. The successful Vietnamese attack on the resistance base at Nong Samet in December 1984 included two battalions of the PRK 286th Division in the initial assault. A subsequent attack on the resistance base at O Bok was carried out successfully by PRK forces without direct Vietnamese involvement. Subsequently, PRK forces participated in virtually every major attack on resistance bases. []

12. We believe that Vietnam will build up PRK forces over the next few years:

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- To permit further Vietnamese withdrawals without diminishing in-country military capabilities.
- And to allow PRK forces to handle rear area security, probably to a point where Vietnam will not have to reinforce with special units each dry season.

Although clear evidence is lacking, Vietnam's annual troop withdrawals since 1982 may have been a result of the delegation to PRK forces of somewhat greater security responsibilities, particularly for point defense in the interior. []

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The Resistance

13. The militarily most effective element of the resistance confronting Vietnam continues to be the Khmer Rouge. Cobelligerents with the Khmer Rouge, but also political rivals, are the two non-Communist factions, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and the Sihanoukists (ANS—Armee Nationale Sihanoukienne). The non-Communists enjoy two important advantages: a degree of political acceptability within Cambodia, and a conviction among the ASEAN Three (Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore) that they must be built up as a counterweight to the Khmer Rouge. The ASEAN countries believe that a strong Cambodian resistance—one not dominated by the Khmer Rouge—could eventually convince Hanoi of the need to seek a negotiated settlement. []

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14. Despite a series of military setbacks for the resistance in 1984-85, we are not aware of any sharp drop in its personnel strength: 30,000 to 40,000 for the Khmer Rouge, 11,000 to 14,000 for the KPNLF, and 7,000 to 9,000 for the Sihanoukists. []

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PAVN/PRK Capabilities

15. We believe that the 130,000 to 140,000 Vietnamese troops permanently based in Cambodia, augmented by the existing PRK force of about 35,000, can accomplish most of the security missions that Hanoi envisions for PAVN/PRK forces in Cambodia. []

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Constraints on Communist Forces

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20. For the Vietnamese, the most important constraint in connection with their occupation of Cambodia is the threat of another large-scale invasion of northern Vietnam by China. Today, we estimate that some 600,000 of Vietnam's million-man army are now deployed in the northern military regions adjacent to the Chinese border, as opposed to the about 100,000 in 1979 before the "Chinese lesson." The invasion obliged Vietnam to treat Cambodia as a secondary theater as it responded to the new threat from China. Information [redacted]

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[redacted] indicate that Vietnamese forces in Cambodia are second-line units, generally officered by northern Vietnamese but manned by conscripts from the south. Equipment is for the most part inferior to that provided units in northern Vietnam. Morale in many Vietnamese units is poor, and malaria is endemic in some. Nevertheless, we find no evidence that Vietnam has not been able to allocate resources commensurate with its objectives in Cambodia. [redacted]

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Securing the Cambodian Interior

18. Ideally, Hanoi seeks a degree of security in the Cambodian interior that will enhance the legitimacy of the Heng Samrin regime and permit the delegation to PRK forces of a greater degree of responsibility for rear area security. Internal security will prove elusive, however, largely without regard to the number of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. [redacted]

[redacted] the forward deployment of Vietnamese and PRK troops has reduced forces committed to internal security. We anticipate that Hanoi, rather than augmenting its own forces in the interior, will attempt to upgrade PRK forces for internal security responsibilities. [redacted]

The Threat to Thailand

19. We do not anticipate a major Vietnamese attack on Thailand, or a move by Hanoi to occupy large areas acknowledged to be Thai territory. [redacted]

21. Vietnam has also paid a heavy indirect cost for the occupation of Cambodia in terms of foreign aid that, as a result of international disapproval of its occupation of Cambodia, has either been terminated or never initiated. In terms of direct costs, however, the occupation has been a low-budget affair. Equipment needs are covered to a large extent by Soviet aid deliveries, while Vietnamese troops in Cambodia are believed to live off the land to a considerable degree. Because of the high level of unemployment in Vietnam, the modest diversion of labor from the economy represented by that portion of the PAVN in Cambodia has little impact on the economy. [redacted]

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22. A much greater constraint is that of equipment. Vietnam's own defense industry is oriented toward the production of low-technology items such as rifles, and the overhaul of more advanced equipment, generally with the assistance of Soviet technicians. Cambodia has no known defense production capability. For more

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advanced equipment, such as artillery and armor, Vietnam is dependent largely on the USSR. Hanoi ranks relatively high among recipients of Soviet military aid: the \$620 million provided in 1984 placed it seventh among recipients of such aid (see table 1). Aid totals were \$1,350 million in 1980, \$545 million in 1981, \$800 million in 1982, and \$730 million in 1983. Considering Moscow's global commitments, however, we expect Soviet aid deliveries to continue at recent levels. Military aid at current levels will provide for some equipment modernization within the PAVN, but will not greatly increase the capabilities of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. []

Table 1 *Million US \$*
The Top 10 Soviet Arms Clients in 1984
(Value of Deliveries)

1	Iraq	1,850
2	Jordan	1,145
3	Angola	900
4	Libya	760
5	Cuba	665
6	India	625
7	Vietnam	620
8	Ethiopia	550
9	East Germany	430
10	Czechoslovakia	350

Prospects

23. We believe that the Vietnamese have not altered their long-term objectives in Cambodia, but have decided to pursue these objectives through a more aggressive military strategy. As a result, the 1984-85 dry season brought a change from Hanoi's earlier policy of containing the resistance, and a focus on destroying the principal resistance bases and on reclaiming border areas. Because the Vietnamese cannot

expect to destroy the resistance entirely, we judge they are pleased with their recent performance and, for this reason, generally satisfied with the military capabilities of Vietnamese/PRK forces in Cambodia. []

24. We expect that Hanoi will now attempt to consolidate its military gains: []

[] to deny to the resistance any bases in the border area; and to improve security in the Cambodian interior. The fact that the 2nd and 7th Divisions have been returned to Vietnam suggests that Hanoi hopes to achieve these objectives with forces now in Cambodia, though probably with some increase in PRK forces. []

25. Vietnam has said that it intends to withdraw from Cambodia by 1990. Although Hanoi probably would like to reduce its forces, we not only find this date unrealistic, but believe that Hanoi intends to maintain a sizable military presence in Cambodia indefinitely. []

26. Should its military fortunes take a turn for the worse, Hanoi has a demonstrated capability to bring in additional forces on comparatively short notice. We believe that it can bring one or two divisions from southern Vietnam to western Cambodia within a period of about 14 days. The most likely contingency that would bring such an augmentation would be a significant increase in resistance activities in the interior, accompanied by evidence that PRK forces were incapable of dealing with the increase. Fragmentary evidence indicates that, while instances of resistance ambushes and sabotage continue, they pose no significant threat to the regime and are generally at levels that Hanoi finds acceptable. Over time, perhaps a year or more, non-Communist resistance efforts []

[] may bear fruit and necessitate some augmentation of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. We believe, however, that for at least the next year Hanoi will settle for the capabilities of its 130,000 to 140,000 troops now in Cambodia. []

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